The Builder.

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BEFORE this number of our journal appears, the 245 plans for the building proposed to be erected in Hyde-park, submitted to the Commissioners, and reported on by the Building Committee, as mentioned by us last week, will be accessible. The plans are arranged in alphabetical order in the large meeting-room at the Institution of Civil Engineers, Great George-street, Westminster, and cover not merely the walls to a sufficient height, and a table around the walls, but both sides of two screens extending nearly the whole length of the apartment. Observant visitors will view with interest the singularly varied ways in which different minds have endeavoured to solve the same problem,—the variety in the ground plans suggested to fill the same area, and to meet the same requirements. "So many men, so many minds," is an old saw; and this they will find still further illustrated when they remember that, amongst this large number of proposed ways of effecting a given object, the six associated minds appointed to judge them did not find what they thought the *best* way,—nor was it expected that they would. Visitors will further not fail to observe the elegance of drawing which characterizes nearly all the *projets* submitted by foreign architects,—the much larger amount of care and thought bestowed on the preparation of them than on the majority of the designs by our countrymen. There is such uniformity in the manner of drawing, &c. observable in several from abroad that they might almost be considered the work of the same hand. The plans are mostly of ingenious intricacy, and several of the elevations display great taste and invention. But having said this we are bound to add that they are mostly mistakes,—very magnificent mistakes some of them, but still mistakes to the full extent of the word, scarcely accordant with the instructions, and wholly aside the thing actually wanted. This applies not the least strongly to the designs selected by the committee for "higher honorary distinction,"* and it will be in respect of this fact that the committee will come into collision with some of the unnoticed competitors. Take for example the design of M. Le Pâtre (Paris): this seems to be for a permanent building, filled with domed and polychromed chambers, which could scarcely be erected by the time the Exhibition is to open. M. Cailloux's elegantly drawn design, again, is for a permanent Italian building; so, too, M. Botrele's harmonious plan; and M. Henard's elevation with its numerous minarets is simply an architectural sport or play.

In one hasty view we have not been able to detect the principles which guided the committee in the selection of the eighteen names entitled to distinction; but certainly they could not have been governed by the considerations which have guided them in framing the adopted plan,† namely,—the provisional nature of the building; the advisability of constructing it to be available for other purposes; and extreme simplicity demanded by the short time in which the work must be completed.

This will be further evident on comparing with these selected designs the plan determined on by the committee, which we now have the pleasure (first) to lay before the public.*

We feel it would be unjust to impugn, on first view, a decision, to arrive at which cost the committee twelve or fifteen lengthened sittings. We are simply stating a question that naturally arises, and which has already been put to us by several correspondents and competitors who have not seen the plans, and judge only from the report we reviewed last week. A part of one of these letters will serve to show the prevalent feeling:—

"When the committee issued their instructions (says the writer), they at the same time pledged themselves, that when a plan should be decided upon by them, they would publish a report, stating the names of those authors of plans, whose ideas they might find it expedient to avail themselves of. The report has come. In making it, the most satisfactory course would have been to give, in the first place, a practical description of the approved plan, enumerating its several leading features in construction and arrangement, then to have classified and arranged the 245 suggested plans according to the number of selected features which each contained, placing the names of their respective authors under each class in the report, headed by a brief note of the peculiar features of that class, followed by a list of those which contained none of the selected features; thereby at the same time doing common justice to *all* contributors, and furnishing a direct index to those authors most deserving of merit, by being able to discriminate which had contributed the greatest number of useful and practical ideas.

Instead, however, of pursuing some such system as this, the report leaves the public completely in the dark as to the peculiar merits even of those contributors selected for reward.

Part II. contains, what I suppose, is to be taken as the best exposition of the merits of contributors that the committee can give, which commences by stating in a tone of commendation, that 'not confining themselves to *suggestions only*, which were invited by the *programme*, a large proportion of them are remarkable for elaboration of thought and elegance of execution.' This, I would contend, is clearly a breach of the specified conditions, viz., that *suggestions only* were to be given; that the plan or drawing sent in, was to be *a mere outline sketch*, upon *a single sheet*, and the committee even recommended that it would be most convenient merely to trace it upon the common paper on which the 'plan of site' was supplied to the public, a space being left upon the sheet for *sketching* any sections or elevations that might be necessary to illustrate the design; and that a written description limited also to 'a single sheet,' was all the exposition of their ideas that authors would be allowed to give. With these conditions before them, the commendation of the committee in the above case is a palpable act of injustice towards others who, very properly observing the letter of those conditions, have been debarred from developing *their* talent, by producing 'elaborated designs, elegantly executed.' The report goes on to state that, 'our illustrious Continental neighbours have especially distinguished themselves (in designing a temporary building for an exhibition), by compositions of the utmost taste and learning, worthy of enduring execution,—examples of what might be done in the *architectural* illustration of the subject (the conditions strictly enjoined contributors not to enter into architectural detail), when viewed in its highest aspect, and, at all events, exhibiting features of grandeur, arrangement, and grace, which your committee have not failed to appreciate.' It then places in contradistinction to these—no doubt admirable, but—out of place productions of architectural genius, the 'practical character of the designs of our own countrymen,' which it states, 'as might have been expected, has been remarkably illustrated in some very striking and simple methods, suited to the temporary purposes of the building, due attention having been paid by them to the pecuniary means allotted to this part of the undertaking.' Yet, notwithstanding this comparison, clearly and indisputably in favour of our own countrymen, as regards the object sought and the conditions stipulated by the committee, we find by the selected list of those authors who are to receive the 'highest honorary distinction' the commissioners can award, that the committee can only discover, out of 195 English and 38 foreign contributors, *three* Englishmen entitled to reward, the remaining *fifteen* out of the eighteen selected being foreigners; or, as regards the whole numbers, in the proportion of 1 to 65 of 'our own countrymen,' the authors of the 'striking and simple methods,' so admirably 'suited to the temporary purpose of the building;' and 1 to about 2½ of foreigners, who, in designing for a temporary building, to be simple, cheap, and readily-constructed, have so overshot the mark as to produce 'compositions' commendable only for 'the utmost taste and learning, and worthy of enduring execution.' Surely something must be wrong here; either the report or the selected list: possibly both.

In conclusion, I cannot help avowing the opinion that a wrong, though I believe unintentionally, has been done to many of the 240, who so readily and 'generously' responded to the call, for their ideas; more particularly as I know, from personal inspection, that at least *one* of the plans altogether omitted from the report contains *five* of the leading features of the approved design.

It is not too late to make amends, as it is quite competent for the committee, when their approved plan is published, to accompany it by a supplementary report, classifying the plans in some such order as I have suggested, and thereby do justice to *all* the contributors, without confounding the reward due for the really useful suggestions, with that sought by those who have distinguished themselves by displaying their eminent architectural attainments, irrespective, and even in violation, of the chief conditions of the competition.*

"T."

The plan submitted by Mr. Bellamy comprises six equal blocks, for capability of extension: the roofs are formed of rolled and angle iron covered with corrugated iron, the material proposed by the majority of the competitors. The ribs extending from a central portion over the aisles are made to balance the former. The elevation makes little pretension to design. ——Mons. Hector Horeau's design is for a building mainly of glass,—a winter garden, in fact,—and displays much ingenuity. The iron ribs for the roofs are arranged so that for the whole of the buildings, although of varying span, only three castings, it is said, would be necessary.—— Mr. Bardwell has a central dome of 150 feet in diameter: the entrance is by what the author describes as "an ostastyle, tripostyle, and polystyle, pedimented portico."——Mr. Baly's plans afford a strong contrast to those of the French artists: he has fallen exactly to the opposite extreme, and would have the building consist simply of a long series of railway sheds, all of saleable sizes, devoid of architectural or constructive

* See p. 265, *ante*.
† See p. 265, *ante*.

* See pp. 282 and 283, in our present number.

* Another of our correspondents, Mr. Elliott, says:—"It has long been a just subject of complaint by the profession that, in competitions, those who the most disregarded the instructions of committees, have been but the more likely to be selected by them. Now, it will be a very discouraging thing if a committee of professional men have themselves fallen into the same error,—an error into which they clearly will have fallen, if, after especially confining the attention of competitors to the production of a good, cheap arrangement, they have selected for 'honourable mention' designs on account of their architectural features, rendering them worthy of permanent execution;' a point on which we were not called on to compete—a point which must render such designs utterly unfitted for the intended purpose of a temporary shelter for the real objects of the exhibition. I think those who compare the report of the committee on the plans with the previous instructions for the preparation of those plans, will find some difficulty in reconciling the one with the other: an equal difficulty will occur in fitting the several clauses of the 'general requirements' to a dome of 300 feet diameter, the cost of which, it strikes me, will prove at least ten times that of the sort of covering for such a given space which these 'requirements' imply."

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